

ST. JOHN IN THE WILDERNESS

Episcopal Church • White Bear Lake, Minnesota

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Amazing Love

November 10, 2019

Dear friends in Christ,

I greet you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Last week during our Sunday worship, we heard the story of a parishioner who reflected upon her life at St. John in the Wilderness. She spoke of the importance of our parish family to her and her family as they have navigated and continue to navigate the challenging waters of their lives. She spoke of the power of our faith community in dealing with loss and the support from this parish that she has experienced in raising her family. She also spoke of her commitment to give of her time, talent and treasure to God and St. John's Church for yet another year. Yes, it is stewardship time once again, and as your new rector, I wish to take this opportunity to reflect with you about why we give to the Church and to provide you with some information that I hope will help you as you consider giving for another year.

While I have only been with St. John's for one year, I am so proud to be a part of this parish family. I have watched as our people have experienced the love of God in Word and Sacrament and have responded to God's great love by giving of their own lives for the sake of the world. This has happened in a variety of ways. Some have given by faithfully participating in our weekly service of worship and offering amazing hospitality during our fellowship time. Others have given their time and energy to outreach programs sponsored by our church. Still others have taught and have been taught in our many Christian formation offerings. Some have opened their homes to our parish family for times of food and fellowship. A faithful few have kept our buildings and grounds in tip-top shape. Children and youth are learning about God's love and the Way of Christ through our Sunday School, family events, and youth activities. These gifts of time and skill and energy are only a few of the many ways that our people have given back to God from that which they have received. Our average Sunday attendance is growing slowly and steadily as we continue to be a vibrant and active community of faith. St. John in the Wilderness is a strong witness to the power of Christ's Spirit in White Bear Lake and beyond. I consider myself so fortunate to be able to serve among you.

Financially, our church has been on solid ground over the course of the year. Through the faithful leadership of your Vestry, a healthy reserve had been built up over the course of the last few years, and we are well positioned to spring into our next chapter of parish life together. In addition, our endowment fund, established and continually supported by the Heritage Society, annually helps to make ends meet. Bills have been paid on time; staff members have been compensated fairly; ECMN apportionment responsibilities have been met; ministry in many areas has been well funded. 2019 has been a very good year, and as we look to 2020 and beyond, I am excited to see where Christ leads us.

When we consider giving to the Church, it entails seeing with eyes of faith and acting from the heart of Christ that beats within each one of us. Really, our giving is a statement of belief. While we may recite the Nicene Creed week after week in our worship, it is the giving of our time, talent, and treasure that truly reflects what we believe. When we take the courageous step of pledging to the church, and when we carry through with sacrificial giving, we are, quite literally, putting our money where our mouth is. We are living what we say we believe.

It is so easy for our fears and worries to overcome us and to hold us in bondage. Primary among these fears is that there won't be enough – enough money, enough time, enough energy. And this fear leads to us holding on to what we have. But God tells us that there **IS** enough and there always **WILL BE** enough. Jesus says, *“do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”* Do we truly trust these words of Jesus, and if so, are we willing to act upon them?

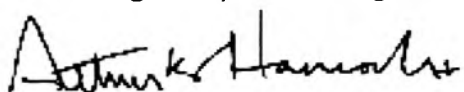
The gifts that God gives us are meant to keep moving. God gives to us that we might pass on to others. If we make the grounded-in-fear decision to just hold on to what God gives us, we have lost faith. Of course, we all do this at times, and God is so good in that he picks us up and gives us new opportunities to try again. But as people of faith, try we must! We must pray for God to instill us with his peace that we might not be anxious and that we might be empowered to pass on what we have received.

A pledge card is included with this letter. Please prayerfully consider your gift to St. John's, and pledge boldly for the coming year. Sunday, November 24th, will be our Pledge Sunday. We will gather as many pledge cards as we are able and offer them to God as a symbol of our commitment to his work in this world. You may also mail your pledge card directly to the church office, and we will add it to our offering. Please do your very best to return your pledge card in a timely manner so that the Finance Team and the Vestry may continue the process of budgeting for the 2020 year. Please remember also, however, that even if you miss the November 24th date, we still need your pledge! We are always grateful to receive pledges and gifts at any time of the year.

The shape and extent of the ministry at St. John in the Wilderness Episcopal Church really and truly depends upon our willingness to give courageously of our time, talent, and treasure! I trust that you will prayerfully consider your gift to St. John's and pledge boldly.

Thank you very much for your pledge to St. John's. As you strive to be a good steward of what God has given you, it is my pledge and that of the staff and volunteer leaders of our parish to do everything we may to faithfully keep God's gifts moving for the extension of his kingdom and for the sake of the world.

Proceeding boldly and fearing nothing,



The Rev. Arthur B. Hancock
Rector